

Chinese Guilds from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries: An Overview

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The Chinese merchant and craft associations which we can recognize as being most similar to European guilds started to proliferate from the mid-eighteenth century onward, although they originated in the late sixteenth century. After the Opium Wars (1839–1841, 1856–1858) and the Taiping rebellion (1850–1864), their numbers soared from the mid-nineteenth century, but commercial and handicraft guilds began to decline after chambers of commerce were promoted in the economic and political reforms during the last years of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Subsequent governments of the Republic of China, both at Peking (1912–1927) and Nanking (1927–1937), first of all launched branch-specific commercial and industrial associations, and eventually ordered the reorganization of traditional guilds. Although that order was implemented formally, various transitional modes and arrangements lingered on until the foundation of the People's Republic in 1949.

A set of Chinese guild statistics published in 1995¹ forms the basis of the present overview, and those figures will be expanded within the framework of a research project currently being conducted by the project group for economic and social history at the University of Utrecht entitled “Data infrastructure for the study of guilds and other forms of corporate collective action in preindustrial times”. This paper discusses distribution, internal organization, functions, the relationships of guilds with different levels of the administration, and points of comparison with guilds worldwide.

TERMINOLOGY AND RESEARCH SITUATION

What are referred to as “Chinese guilds” are not quite the equivalent of European guilds. Chinese trade and craft associations possessed similar functions but in institutional and political settings rather different from

1. “Zhongguo gongshang ye hanghui jianbiao” [Short Table of the Chinese Craft and Commercial Guilds, 1655–1911], in Peng Zeyi (ed.), *Zhongguo gongshang hanghui shiliao ji* [Collection of Historical Materials on Chinese Craft and Commercial Guilds], 2 vols (Beijing, 1995), II, pp. 997–1048.

those of their European counterparts, and were first introduced as “guilds” during the nineteenth century by foreign authors who conducted business with them directly or investigated them in scholarly research.² A second wave of research interest followed in the 1920s,³ and since the 1930s Japanese historians of China have used the phonetic rendering *girudo*.⁴ In Chinese, the generic term *hanghui*, meaning “trade-line associations”, has been applied as a translation of the term “guild” since then.⁵

But the term *hanghui* was rarely used contemporaneously, which is one reason why its application to the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing “guilds” has been criticized since the 1980s.⁶ Moreover, to some scholars on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, the term *hanghui*, as a translation of “guild”, seemed to relegate Chinese trade and craft associations to the level of the supposedly feudalistic, monopolistic, and capitalism-impeding corporations which,

2. K., “Chinese Guilds and their Rules”, *The China Review*, 12 (August 1883), pp. 5–9; Daniel J. MacGowan, “Chinese Guilds or Chambers of Commerce and Trade Unions”, *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 21 (1886), pp. 133–192; A.H. Bach, “Regeln der Kanton Kaufmannsgilde in Pakhoi”, *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen an der Königlichen Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1905), pp. 263–266; Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Guilds of China: With an Account of the Gild Merchant or Co-Hong of Canton* (London, 1909). Since the 1880s, serialized reports on the local economy, including guilds, in the treaty ports were published by the Imperial Maritime Customs. See, for example, Imperial Maritime Customs (ed.), *I. Statistical Series, 6. Decennial Reports on the Trade, Navigation, Industries etc. of the Ports open to Foreign Commerce in China and Corea [...], 1882–1891* (Shanghai, 1896), p. ix, which demands that the British representatives of the respective treaty ports declare “what provinces have *hui-kuan* at your port and in what provinces your port has *hui-kuan*, with the rules of these clubs or guilds, and the privileges and duties of membership etc”.

3. Sidney D. Gamble and John Stewart Burgess, *Peking: A Social Survey* (New York, 1921); John Stewart Burgess, *The Guilds of Peking* (New York, 1928; repr. Taipei, 1966); Pierre B. Maybon, *Essai sur les Associations en Chine* (Paris, 1925); G.G. Avenarius, *The Chinese Guilds: Brief Sketch of Their History with Colour Printed Signs Representing Different Lines of Trade* (Harbin, 1928); Wada Sei, “Kaikan kōsho no kigen ni tsuite” [On the Origins of Association Houses and Public Halls], *Shigaku zasshi* [*History Journal*], 33 (1922), pp. 808–811; Shanhai shuppan kyōkai chōsabu (ed.), *Shina no dōgyō kumi'ai to shō kanshū* [*The Trade Associations of China and Commercial Customary Law*] (Shanghai, 1925).

4. Negishi Tadashi, *Shina no girudo no kenkyū* [*A Study of Chinese Guilds*] (Tokyo, 1938); Niida Noboru, “Pekin no kōshō girudo to sono enkaku (shohen)” [The Peking Craft and Commercial Guilds and their Development, I], *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjō kiyō* [*Memoirs of the Research Institute for Oriental Culture*], 1 (1943), pp. 239–358.

5. Quan Hansheng, *Zhongguo hanghui zhidu shi* [*The History of the Chinese Guild System*] (Shanghai, 1934), and since the 1950s, especially in Peng Zeyi’s writings, most importantly the collection of guild materials, *Zhongguo gongshang hanghui shiliao ji*, but also in the Chinese literature on the “sprouts of capitalism” of the 1950s to the 1980s.

6. Lü Zuoxie, “Ming Qing shiqide huiguan bing fei gongshangye de hanghui” [The Ming and Qing Association Houses are Definitely Not Merchant and Artisan “Guilds”], *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* [*Research on Chinese History*], 3 (1982), pp. 66–79, 66.

in the view of Karl Marx, was what the European guilds were.⁷ They prefer more explicit synthetic terms, such as *gongshangye tuanti* (meaning “craft and trade associations”), or they make do without a generic term and refer instead to the original designations of *huiguan* and *gongsuo*. The term *hanghui* is still used in some recent publications,⁸ but more Chinese historians tend to outline the differences between their indigenous trade and craft associations and European *jierte*, which is the phonetic rendering of “guild”. Notwithstanding those reservations, in Western studies of Chinese history the term “Chinese guild” for trade and craft associations is still in general use.

As well as *huiguan* in its meaning of “assembly houses” and *gongsuo* meaning “public halls”, Chinese guilds were called *bang*, or “mutual help associations”, or were named after their places of assembly, such as Confucian academies, *shuyan*, or after locations of Daoist and popular religious worship. The list in the appendix shows that the most common designations were *gongsuo*, which indicates mainly associations for those with the same occupation, and *huiguan*, referring to common-origin associations of people of the same local origin, often also rendered as *Landsmannschaften*.

Most *huiguan* outside Peking increasingly acquired economic functions as places where merchant or craft associations convened to coordinate their activities, and they functioned as hostels, restaurants, entertainment centres, and places of reference for those seeking work.⁹ That means they are important indicators for migrational patterns between specific regions. On the Upper Yangzi, especially in Sichuan, *huiguan* channelled peasant immigration

7. Qiu Pengsheng, *Shiba, shijiu shiji Suzhou cheng de xinxing gongshangye tuanti* [*The New Associations of Merchants and Artisans in the City of Suzhou, 1700–1900*] (Taipei, 1990), pp. 1–3; see also Peng Nansheng, *Hanghui zhidu de jindai mingyun* [*The Fate of the Guilds in the Modern Era*] (Beijing, 2003). For a synopsis of mainstream views on European guilds and the position held by Marx, see Josef Ehmer, “Artisans, Guilds and Craft Regulations in European History and Historiography”, in Christine Moll-Murata, Song Jianze, and Hans Ulrich Vogel (eds), *Chinese Handicraft Regulations of the Qing Dynasty: Theory and Application* (Munich, 2005), pp. 61–76, 65; Hugo Soly’s introduction to his contribution in the present volume; and Luca Mocarelli’s article also in this volume. The classic study which most pointedly criticizes late nineteenth-century guilds for impeding the development of capitalism in China is Peng Zeyi’s “Shijiu shiji houqi Zhongguo chengshi shougongye shangye hanghui de chongjian he zuoyong” [The Re-establishment and Functions of Chinese Urban Handicraft and Commercial Guilds in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century], *Lishi yanjiu* [*Historical Studies*], 1 (1965), pp. 71–102.

8. Peng, *Hanghui zhidu*; Wang Xiang, “Jindai Zhongguo shougongye hanghui de yanbian” [The Evolution of the Modern Chinese Handicraft Guilds], *Zhongguo jingjishi yanjiu* [*Studies in Chinese Economic History*], 4 (1998), pp. 56–70.

9. For a sophisticated analysis of the various functions of *huiguan*, see L. Eve Armentrout Ma, “Fellow-Regional Associations in the Ch’ing Dynasty: Organizations in Flux for Mobile People. A Preliminary Survey”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 18 (1984), pp. 307–330.

from the other provinces. The *huiguan* in the capital, by contrast, mainly served as hostels and liaison offices for fellow countrymen who stayed in Peking on official business or for academic formation and examination.¹⁰ About 400 *huiguan* are reported for Peking in the late Qing, but only an estimated 10 to 20 per cent were commercial or craft associations.¹¹

Between the early seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, within Peking there was a certain amount of segregation between scholar-officials and merchants even from the same locales as both groups were attracted to different areas of the spacious capital, but their different social standings might have played a role. In 1712, for instance, a group of Canton merchants built their own *huiguan* in Peking in order to keep themselves apart from the scholar-officials in Canton.¹² The total figure in Belsky's estimate for late Qing and early Republican *huiguan* is at least 2,000.¹³

More recently, Western research into *huiguan* and *Landsmannschaften* has focused on their political role in nation building. The studies by Rowe,¹⁴ Goodman,¹⁵ and Belsky set out from the question as to whether common-origin ties led to particularism and impeded an autonomous citizenship, as Max Weber assumed.¹⁶ Rowe's study on Hankou, Goodman's for Shanghai,

10. Richard Belsky, *Localities at the Center: Native Place, Space, and Power in Late Imperial Beijing* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), p. 20. In this in-depth study of the Peking *huiguan*, which the author renders as "native-place lodge", he describes their main characteristics as being "established and operated by and for native-place compatriots" and holding "corporately owned property".

11. The Peking guild historians Li Hua *et al.* (eds), *Ming Qing yilai Beijing gongshang huiguan beike xuanji* [Selected Stele Texts of Peking Commercial and Craft Guild Houses from the Ming and Qing Dynasties] (Beijing, 1980), p. 20, estimate that 86 per cent of the Peking *huiguan* houses were established as hostels and meeting places for scholar-officials. See also Belsky, *Localities at the Center*, pp. 59–60.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 37, figure 2.1. However, based on written evidence and field research, a scholar of *huiguan* in Sichuan province has come to a figure of 1,400 *huiguan* for Sichuan alone (Lan Yong, "Qingdai Sichuan tuzhu he yimin fenbu de dili tezheng yanjiu" [Study on the Original Population of Sichuan in the Qing Dynasty and the Geographical Characteristics of Migrational Distribution], *Zhongguo lishi dili luncong* [Collected Essays on Chinese Historical Geography], 1 (1995), and personal conversations with the author, October 2007), while in Belsky's account the figure for Sichuan is 586.

14. William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796–1889* (Stanford, CA, 1984), and *idem*, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796–1895* (Stanford, CA, 1989).

15. Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853–1937* (Berkeley, CA, 1995).

16. Max Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* (Glencoe, IL, 1951), pp. 13–20, quoted in Belsky, *Localities at the Center*, p. 7. According to Max Weber, whose informants on Chinese guilds were MacGowan and Morse, the Chinese in cities and countryside practiced self-government, and the individual was extremely dependent on professional associations. See Max Weber, *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen. Konfuzianismus und Taoismus*, Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer and Petra Kolonko (eds) (Tübingen, 1991), p. 40.

and Belsky's for Peking all came to the conclusion that Weber erred in his view, and have developed instead models of multiple identities to show that native-place ties could enhance identification with the host city and, at a later stage, with the nation-state. In recent Chinese research, the end of the guilds and their transformation into chambers of commerce in the larger framework of a transition to a civil society have attracted the attention of scholars such as Ma Min and Zhu Ying, Chen Zhongping, Peng Nansheng, and Wang Xiang.¹⁷

CONSTITUTIVE FACTORS, DEFINITIONS, AND ORIGINS

In the opinion of most researchers, the constituent elements of Qing guilds are a common-interest group of merchants or artisans, a commonly owned, or rented, place of assembly, written regulations, and recognition by the local administration. William Rowe points out that the last three characteristics were “signals” for the transition of a guild to formal organizational status.¹⁸ Qiu Pengsheng outlines the process of “formalization” of the Suzhou guilds as follows: individual artisans or merchants mobilize colleagues on grounds of common home, religious beliefs, and the necessity of mutual help, to form a group. They raise funds for a meeting place and seek the recognition of the local administration. In a second step, the group negotiates and formalizes measures for the protection and use of its common property.¹⁹

The origins of the Chinese guilds established in the sixteenth century can be found in associations of travelling merchants, aliens who with increased geographic mobility and trade between regions started to settle down nearer their sales markets. Such autonomous initiatives stand in stark contrast to earlier types of business associations (*hang* “[business] street/line”, *zuo* “manufacturers”, *tuan* “associations”) which had been installed by order of the government since the eighth century.²⁰

The earlier associations had served the government in recruiting artisans for public works and to coordinate delivery of taxes in kind by merchants, and contributed to urban security. As cities expanded, it was no longer practicable to maintain the concept of one trade line per street, and that probably led to the formation of voluntary merchant associations beyond

17. Ma Min and Zhu Ying, *Chuantong yu jindai de erzhong bianzou – Wan Qing Suzhou shanghui ge an yanjiu* [Dual Variations of Tradition and Modernity: A Case Study of the Late Qing Suzhou Trade Associations] (Chengdu, 1993); Chen Zhongping, “The Origins of Chinese Chambers of Commerce in the Lower Yangzi Region”, *Modern China*, 27 (2001), pp. 155–201; Peng, *Hanghui zhidu*; Wang, “Jindai Zhongguo shouongye hanghui de yanbian”, pp. 56–70.

18. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society*, p. 257.

19. Qiu, *Shiba, shijiu*, p. 190.

20. Peter Golas, “Early Ch’ing Guilds”, in G. William Skinner (ed.), *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA, 1977), pp. 555–580, especially pp. 555–557.

government-ordained restrictions.²¹ The numbers of such guilds are often given, approximately, as 36, 72, 120, and 360, implying their great variety.²²

One diary of the Southern Song (1128–1276) provisory capital, Lin'an, refers to "414" *hang*, which could refer to individual shops,²³ while local histories name 6 markets and 11 business quarters of the *hang* and *tuan* type as well as one printing and publishing quarter.²⁴ Official writings and local histories of the Tang (608–906), Song (960–1276), and Yuan (1276–1368) dynasties record some of the names, locations, products sold or made, and activities of those associations, but no guild epigraphy exists comparable to that from the sixteenth century and later. Scattered evidence suggests that the meeting places of the early "guilds" were temples, such as the silk-loom god temple established between 1078 and 1085 in Suzhou, while one of the earliest references to a guild of the *gongsuo* type mentions the guild house of the silk weavers of Wu Prefecture, that is, Suzhou, dating from 1295.²⁵

21. Katō Shigeshi, "On the Hang or Associations of Merchants in China, with Especial Reference to the Institution in the Tang and Sung Periods", *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Tōyō bunko*, 8 (1936), pp. 45–83. See too Shiba Yoshinobu, *Commerce and Society in Sung China*, Mark Elvin (trans.) (Ann Arbor, MI, 1970), p. 2, who characterized the change from the Tang to the Song guilds as a transformation "into something more nearly approaching an autonomous trade association".

22. Katō, "On the Hang", pp. 57–58.

23. *Xihu laoren fansheng lu* [Record of the Splendours [of the Capital] by the Old Man on the West Lake], c.1250. "Dongjing meng Hua lu etc." [A Dream of Central Florescence (i.e. China) in the Eastern Capital] (Beijing, 1982), in *Zhongguo pengren guji congkan* [Collection of Classical Chinese Works on Culinary Art], p. 18.

24. These were also noted – as the result of hearsay or personal inspection – by Marco Polo, who may have visited Lin'an in the 1280s or early 1290s, just after the dynastic transition from the Southern Song to the Mongol Yuan. Marco Polo, *Il Milione. Introduzione, edizione del testo toscano* ("Ottimo") [...], Ruggero M. Ruggieri (ed.) (Florence, 1986), p. 235, refers to "dodici arti, cioè d'ogni mestiere una; e ciascuna arte hae dodicimilia istazioni, cioè dodicimilia case; e in ciascuna bottega hae almeno dieci uomeni, e in tale quindici [...] e in tale quaranta, non tutti maestri, ma discepoli." I am grateful to Luca Mocarrelli, who discussed with me the probability of there being twelve "guilds" (*arti*), one for each trade, and 12,000 houses/stations (*istazioni/case/botteghe*) per "guild", with between 10 and 40 men working there, adding up to an artisan workforce of between 120,000 and 480,000. Lin'an registered c.250,000 households and an estimated population of one million in the Southern Song, two decades before Marco Polo arrived in China. The total figure for the number of artisans and/or merchants seems too high, as is frequently the case in Marco Polo's record, but the figure for the business quarters comes close to that recorded in Lin'an's city gazetteer from the 1270s. See Christine Moll-Murata, *Die chinesische Regionalbeschreibung* (Wiesbaden, 2001), p. 80.

25. Guo Rongdong, "The Silk-Weaving Craftsmen in Suzhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties", in Brian Ranson (ed.), *A Preliminary Study of Craft Guilds in China*, III: *Application and Transformation of Chinese Guilds: A Case Study of Selected Guilds in Beijing, Jingdezhen, Shanghai and Suzhou* (Hong Kong, 1998), pp. 7–18, 10. After the "Return of the Guilds" conference in 2006, Larry Epstein kindly provided me with these 1997–1998 proceedings of a series of workshops held by the study group on Chinese guilds at the Baptist University of Hong Kong.

The link between the early guilds and those founded after the mid-Ming is tenuous however. In the early phase of twentieth-century guild studies, Japanese and Chinese scholars assumed a continuous development from the Tang and Song to the Ming and Qing guilds, especially because the Ming and Qing guilds in the cities referred to themselves as *hang*.²⁶ The view of those early scholars has since been refuted on the ground that in their own epigraphic writings the Ming and Qing guilds do not claim origins prior to the late Ming.²⁷

The rise of the Ming guilds coincides with the decline of the system of obligatory labour that had served local and central governments since the foundation of the Chinese empire in the third century BCE. From the late seventeenth century, work services as a rule were no longer requisitioned without payment, and especially during the time of the Qing dynasty governments were prepared to pay market rates (or near market rates) for labour wages and for finished products.²⁸

The new type of guilds from the sixteenth century onward still coordinated the merchants' and artisans' obligations to the government, but that was not the main reason for their foundation, which was rather to regulate access and homogenize markets and opportunities for the benefit of their members, since private markets and interregional trade had expanded greatly during the late Ming. Depending on the lens of historical inspection applied, the differences between merchant and craft associations of the Tang to the Yuan dynasties and guilds from the late Ming until the Republic might seem less distinct.

The two subsequent types of association create a contrast, as instruments for government control of the economy in the early phase from the eighth to the fourteenth centuries, as against independent foundations intended for the convenience of merchants and artisans from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. However, to a certain extent the original intention and eventual development seem to have become inverted. Song and Yuan merchant associations might develop into powerful players wielding great influence on not just the urban economy,²⁹ while guilds during the late Qing would cooperate closely with municipal authorities, complement them, or sometimes even supersede them.

26. Especially Katō, "On the Hang", pp. 45–83, 72.

27. Golas, "Early Ch'ing Guilds", p. 555.

28. Christine Moll-Murata, "Working for the State: The Chinese Labour Market for Manufacture and Construction, 1000–1900", p. 3, available at <http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/papers/mollmurata05.pdf> [last accessed 21 July 2008].

29. Harriet Zurndorfer, for instance, argues that the silk lobby based in Xi'an prevented the spread of cotton into North China before the second millennium. See Harriet Zurndorfer, "The Resistant Fibre: Cotton Consumption and Production in Ming and Qing China", in Giorgio Riello and Prasanna Parthasarathi (eds), *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200–1850* (Oxford, forthcoming). For a discussion of what made European guilds "powerful", see Hugo Soly's article in this volume, pp. 45–71.

The early Ming government continued to divide the business quarters into *hang*, for instance in Peking, and exerted tight control over merchants' and artisans' mobility.³⁰ The earliest instances of the new guilds can be found in the fifteenth century,³¹ but more solid evidence is available from the Wanli era of the Ming dynasty from 1573–1619 and later. One of the first aims of such associations was to support each other with information and bypass local brokers and middlemen, and guilds most often formed *huiguan* and were based on the membership criterion of common geographic origin.

In the other dominant form of guilds, based on the principle of common occupation and usually designated as *gongsuo*, common origin might well play a role but it was not a requirement. A marked difference between Chinese and European guilds is the fact that it was not necessary to be a formally registered citizen of a particular city or place³² in order to become a guild member, but – at least for the *huiguan* type – it was necessary to belong to a particular place of origin.

Not all guilds or protoguilds provided guild houses, regulations, and official recognition.³³ Most of the guilds that do feature all three criteria were founded or reorganized in the late nineteenth century and show a certain sophistication in their organization that was due to the growing number of interested persons and enterprises. As we shall see in the present volume, their level of formalization ensures particular comparability with Ottoman and European and guilds, even if the latter were all but defunct by the time the Chinese guilds reached their apex. It does not, however, represent the whole range of “collective action” (De Moor) which was deployed in the crafts and in commerce.

When we widen the perspective to include east and south-east Asia, we find *huiguan* in Japan and south-east Asia established by Chinese merchants, mainly from the provinces of maritime China, Fujian, and Guangdong, who traded overseas. As within China, their activities were not restricted to economic purposes; they worked as quasi-diplomatic missions too.³⁴

30. Yang Junyou, “Guild, Guild-Halls and Collectively Established Associations: An Exploration of Forms of Voluntary Association in Beijing during the Ming and Qing Dynasties”, in Ranson, *A Preliminary Study of Craft Guilds in China*, pp. 20–36, 20.

31. I am grateful to Harriet Zurndorfer for drawing my attention to Michel Marmé, *Suzhou: Where the Gods of all the Provinces Converge* (Stanford, CA, 2005), p. 137, who cites a reference to the 1466 foundation of a guild of cotton-cloth merchants from the Jiangsu districts of Jiading, Kunshan, and Suzhou at Linqing, an important entrepôt city on the Grand Canal in Shandong.

32. On obligatory citizenship and ways to attain it in the Low Countries, see Tine De Moor's contribution to the present volume, pp. 179–212.

33. Peng Nansheng observed that “trades without associations and associations without regulations” were a common phenomenon; Peng, *Hanghui zhidu*, p. 22.

34. For instance, Dai Yifeng gives the following analysis of the main activities of the Fujian merchant association (Bamin huiguan, later renamed Fujian huiguan), established in 1868 in Nagasaki: “(a) organizing memorial ceremonies for ancestors; (b) subsidizing the overseas

A further question is whether the Chinese guild model was adopted in neighbouring countries. As shown in Mary Louise Nagata's contribution, it was not taken on in Japan, and to only a certain extent in Korea, while in Vietnam the so-called "36 business streets" in the capital Than-long, which still exist today in what is modern Hanoi, were specialized in particular trades and crafts. Than-long had held a population of over 100,000 since the fifteenth century, and was the country's major manufacturing centre.³⁵ The "business streets" are often rendered as the "36 guilds", but the figure of 36 rings familiar with the earlier Chinese pattern of 36, 72, or 360 guilds: there are certainly more than 36 streets today.³⁶ The artisan and trade centre dates back to the thirteenth century, the "streets", which as with the Chinese are designated as *hang*, to the fifteenth century.³⁷ The importance of the Chinese impact on the Vietnamese structure is disputed, but people from the same native villages settled in urban artisan and trading neighbourhoods, so parallels with the Chinese pattern can at least be assumed.

DISTRIBUTION IN TIME AND SPACE

The "Short Table of the Chinese Craft and Commercial Guilds, 1655–1911" contains a list of about 600 dated and 130 undated guild houses and associations, but since few of the stele inscriptions which form an important source for Chinese guild history were considered for its compilation, it is certainly not complete and requires enlargement.³⁸ We may assume that it gives an initial impression that is not too far off the mark for features such as distribution over time and space as well as the regions of origin of the guild members. According to the list (see Table 2 in the Appendix), guild concentration was highest in the Lower, Middle, and Upper Yangzi in the provinces of Jiangsu, Hubei, Hunan, and

Chinese schools; (c) giving financial aid to poor villagers from south Fujian; (d) organizing social and diplomatic activities; (e) collecting donations for China; and (f) administering the temple and public graveyard"; Dai Yifeng, "A Case of the Overseas Chinese Business Network: The Tai Yi Firm in Nagasaki and its Documents", *IIAS Newsletter Online*, 17 (December 1998), available at <http://www.iias.nl/iiasn/17/institutes/17EAXC10.html> [last accessed 21 July 2008].

35. Anthony Reid, "Economic and Social Change, c.1400–1800", in Nicholas Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, 4 vols (Cambridge, 1999), I, pt. 2, p. 129.

36. Barbara Cohen, "The History of Hanoi's Old Quarter", *Destination: Vietnam Magazine* (September/October 1994), available at <http://www.queencafe.com.vn/History/Hanoiold-quarter.htm> [last accessed 21 July 2008]. Cohen points out that each "guild" had its own patron saint, to whom local temples were devoted.

37. Michael Waibel, "The Ancient Quarter of Hanoi: A Reflection of Urban Transition Processes", *Asien*, 92 (2004), pp. 30–48, 31, available at <http://www.asienkunde.de/articles/Waibel92.pdf> [last accessed 21 July 2008].

38. Vincent Goossaert, "Matériaux et recherches nouvelles sur les corporations chinoises urbaines traditionnelles (des Ming à 1949)", *Revue bibliographique de Sinologie*, 17 (1999), p. 210.

Sichuan, in the cities of Suzhou, Shanghai, Changsha, Hankou, and Chongqing, and along the coast with Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, Zhejiang, Zhili, and Fengtian. They were the richest and economically most advanced areas in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the most treaty ports. Further research will have to focus on inland regions which seem quite poorly represented, such as Sichuan, Jiangxi, and Yunnan, not forgetting Mongolia³⁹ and Manchuria at the north-western and north-eastern frontiers. Evidence from Foshan stele inscriptions shows that at least ten further guilds that possessed guild houses should be added for the industrial region near Canton.⁴⁰

Typical regions of origin were the coastal provinces of Guangdong, Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangsu, Shandong, and Zhili, as well as the home provinces of the famous local bankers, the Shanxi merchants, and the most efficient salt traders, the Huizhou merchants from Anhui.

Distribution over time is shown in Figure 3 in the Appendix. The “short table” gives the names of only twelve guild houses founded during the Ming, nine of them in Peking and one each in Hunan, Suzhou, and Foshan near Canton. Nine were expressly *huiguan*, and with the exception of the potters’ guild in Foshan they were all merchant guilds. Further investigation will undoubtedly bring more foundations to light, especially along those great traffic arteries the Yangzi and the Grand Canal. Closer examination of the Ming *huiguan* may well show that outside Peking too more were built and used by merchants than is known so far.

However, not much information will be available as to whether they had guild regulations and thus displayed all three qualifications for a “guild” stipulated above. The slight rise in the number of craft guilds in the eighteenth century has been attributed to the need of the government to enlist the help of employers against their unruly workers. The much bigger increase after the mid-nineteenth century was caused by the growing business and work opportunities engendered by the presence of foreign capital, and in the last few years of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the rise of native capitalist-style production and its competition with traditional manufacture and commerce.

FUNCTIONS AND INTERNAL ORGANIZATION

Like most guilds worldwide, the Chinese variety combined economic, social, and religious functions. Economically, they regulated wages and

39. See the epigraphic materials contained in Imahori Seiji’s study *Chūgoku hōken shakai no kikō: Kisui (Fufuboto) ni okeru shakai shūdan no jittai chōsa* [*The Structure of Feudal Chinese Society: A Survey of the Actual Situation of Social Groups in Guisui/Hohhot*] (Tokyo, 1955).

40. *Ming Qing Foshan beike wenxian jingji ziliao* [*Economic Materials in Ming and Qing Dynasty Foshan Epigraphy and Printed Documents*] (Guangzhou, 1987).

prices and tried to secure monopolies in their territories by inclusion of all the actors in the trade. As a rule, guild regulations stipulated that rather than keeping newcomers out, everybody in the trade should be forced into the guilds.⁴¹ Other important tasks were to secure access to raw materials and the training of the labour force.

Guild regulations most often fixed the duration of apprenticeship, three years as a rule, but did not specify exact requirements for “learning the trade”. Since the number of apprentices a workshop could take on was obviously limited, often to just one person, the three-year duration actually served to regulate wage costs and work quality, rather than the period of actual training,⁴² and Chinese guilds did not formally test the master’s qualifications, for whoever had funds to pay guild entrance fees and open a shop could do so.

The economic role of the Chinese guilds has been interpreted in two divergent ways. One view is that they enabled merchants to make a profit by reducing transaction costs, the costs incurred through brokers for example, and therefore expedited trade and production. The other view is that by restricting the number of players and generally curbing competition, they impeded the free flow of trade and in due course stifled the rise of capitalism.⁴³

The social functions of the guilds included the provision to members of welfare facilities such as communal cemeteries, elementary schools, and some relief of poverty, as well as municipal services such as firefighting, policing, and maintenance of general infrastructure including streets and bridges. Last but by no means least, they might provide entertainment in the form of theatrical productions or processions for guild patrons.⁴⁴ Naturally, not all guilds could fulfil all those tasks for everyone, but at least in Hankou, where commerce thrived in the second half of the nineteenth century, charity and community service was not restricted to guild members.⁴⁵

William Rowe has discussed the specific devotional piety which served as a form of self-assertion and created feelings of accountability to the patron saints of guilds. In nineteenth-century Hankou, virtually every guild was a religious fraternity too.⁴⁶ The observers of the Peking guilds were less convinced of the importance of religion in the twentieth-century capital; but Timothy Bradstock, reading the same sources, concludes that

41. Rowe, “Ming-Qing Guilds”, *Ming Qing yanjiu*, 1 (1992), pp. 47–60, 60.

42. A representative of the Peking barbers’ guild informed Niida Noboru that big and reputable shops employed few apprentices and many journeymen, and only small places had many apprentices; Niida Noboru *et al.* (eds), *Pekin kōshō girudo shiryōshū* [*Collected Materials on Peking Craft and Commercial Guilds*], 6 vols (Tokyo, 1975–1983), II, p. 298.

43. See Rowe, “Ming-Qing Guilds”, p. 48, for a discussion of the controversial positions of Chen and Myers, Negishi Tadashi, Quan Hansheng, and Peng Zeyi.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

45. *Idem*, *Hankow: Commerce and Society*, pp. 265–266.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

if religious service was not practised, that was because of lack of funds rather than disenchantment or scepticism.⁴⁷

As a rule, Qing guilds were organized into management boards, with directors recruited from among members. Cases of rotational leadership are known as well as cases where guild offices were hereditary.⁴⁸ A British observer in the late nineteenth century found that the rotational system showed traits of “almost pure democracy”, as opposed to the English guilds which were subjected to oligarchic rule. In the most recent monograph on Chinese guilds, Peng Nansheng too reflects on an organization which combined “rudimentary democracy, authoritarianism, and customary law”.⁴⁹ He sees the democratic elements in the yearly rotating directorship system of some guilds and the elections in others⁵⁰ in the fact that a quorum was necessary for important decisions and that in some guilds secret ballots could be used in votes for controversial decisions.⁵¹

The tasks of boards comprised arbitration among the members and active support in cases of official encroachments or unfounded customer claims. Moreover, in the course of the late nineteenth century, some of the common-origin guilds started to include smaller guilds or networks (*bang*).⁵² As they gained huge memberships over several thousands of people and considerable corporate property in the form of large guild houses and other buildings, corporate tasks became increasingly complex. In guilds of that size, directors and managers had to deal with financial matters and the allocation of expenses for building and maintenance of guild houses and other things such as cemeteries and schools, or arranging sacrifices, theatrical performances, plenary meetings, or banquets.

John Burgess, who took the opportunity to interview representatives of most Peking guilds in the 1920s, summarized the most salient features of those guilds as follows:⁵³ guilds were local in character and field of operation; their general objective was to conserve the welfare of all the

47. Burgess, *The Guilds of Peking*, p. 214; Timothy Bradstock, “Craft Guilds in Ch’ing Dynasty China” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1984), pp. 248–249.

48. Morse, *Guilds of China*, p. 12, cites as examples the Tea Guild at Shanghai, with “an annually elected committee of twelve, each committee man acting in rotation for one month as chairman, or manager” the bankers’ guild at Ningbo, with an elected treasurer and a committee of twelve; the carpenters’ guild at Wenzhou, with five elected headmen; the millers’ guild of Wenzhou, composed of sixteen mill proprietors who elected four representatives annually. Niida, *Pekin kōshō girudo shiryōshū*, III, p. 529, heard from a representative of the hatmakers’ guild that leadership positions were now rotational, but had been hereditary before 1928.

49. Peng, *Hanghui zhidu*, p. 32.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

52. This process has been described by Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society*, p. 264, as the formation of “multiplex guilds”.

53. Burgess, *The Guilds of Peking*, pp. 211–212.

members of the respective groups; in the guild, the relationship between employers, employees, and apprentices was close and personal; the intention of the guilds was to limit unrestricted competition between members; they exerted solidarity against opposing bodies, such as other guilds, customers, or employers, and the administration; and they owned corporate property derived from contributions by the members.

In contrast to so essentially positive and nostalgic a view, authors such as Peng Zeyi have pointed out the harsher sides of guild practices in the late nineteenth century, such as demanding heavy accession fees from apprentices who had finished their training periods, or cooperating in many ways with the authorities to the disadvantage of their membership.⁵⁴

In fact, when reading an overview of the functions that European guilds fulfilled,⁵⁵ we find most similarities are on the economic side. Cultural and religious functions varied in expression rather than in substance, but the differences seemed greater in the fields of training, education, and qualification, and the inclusion or exclusion of artisans or merchants because of gender⁵⁶ or geographic origin, and most conspicuously, the political and legal setting of the guilds.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE GOVERNMENT

As in the case of guild functions, opinions are divided on the relations between government and guilds. Some studies stress the importance of the recognition of guilds by local authorities. Bradstock assumes that all the known craft guilds were sanctioned by the local authorities, and that in fact their main rationale was to assist the government in the administration of commerce and crafts, and especially to control unruly elements.⁵⁷ He argues that the rising numbers of guilds after the mid-eighteenth century coincided with the problem of population growth happening without any concomitant increase in administrative personnel.⁵⁸ “Relieving the government of some of its burden”, in Bradstock’s terms, meant first and foremost ensuring municipal security by controlling the workforce to prevent it from striking and rioting. Local administrations would rather depend on employers’ guilds than allow journeymen or unskilled labourers to form their own associations. There are well-described cases

54. Peng, “Shijiu shiji houqi”, pp. 71–102, especially pp. 93ff.

55. Ehmer, “Artisans, Guilds and Craft Regulations”, pp. 65ff.

56. Only two in Peng Zeyi’s collection of guild charters from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries expressly forbade women to “participate in religious veneration in the guild house” or “enter the guild house”. These cases may well show that women had entered the guild houses and offered sacrifices, or had tried to do so. Many more guild charters kept silent about women. See Peng, *Zhongguo gongshang hanghui shiliao ji*, II, p. 630, for the Jiangnan *huiguan* in Chongqing, and p. 635, for the Guangdong *huiguan* in Fuzhou.

57. Bradstock, “Craft Guilds”, pp. 63–66.

58. *Ibid.*

such as those of the Suzhou calenderers, who in 1715 were refused permission to register a journeymen's guild because the local government and the employers feared them as notorious strikers and troublemakers.⁵⁹

Peng Zeyi discusses the intensified control of guilds by local governments after the Opium Wars in the mid-nineteenth century, when guilds were required to collect a transit tariff called *lijin* and had to perform municipal work.⁶⁰ Peng Nansheng, citing four examples from Suzhou, insists that "private" – in other words "secret" – guilds not acknowledged by the local government were strictly forbidden.⁶¹ A secretly founded guild of tobacco processors was banned in 1867 for trying to monopolize the market. In the same year, in reaction to a complaint by eighteen candle-makers' shops that twelve individuals had tried to organize a guild and "incite the masses [i.e. the workers] against their employers", their association too was declared illegal. In 1870, Suzhou brocade weavers were not allowed to "try to establish a guildhouse [*gongsuo*], set up a guild leader and guild regulations, and molest their colleagues by enforcing donations." The guild was also forbidden from reopening under another name or from defining itself as a religious community. In another case, a magistrate prohibited the establishment of a second guild for printers and dyers on the grounds that the previous guild was functioning well and was active in charitable work, so there was no need for a second guild. But while the local authorities enforced their power of sanction, the guilds themselves could expand their autonomy in the framework of cooperation with officials.⁶²

A contrary position was expressed in one of the earliest studies on the Chinese guilds, by Hosea Morse, Statistical Secretary of the Inspectorate General of Customs in China, an institution founded by foreign traders and which collected maritime trade taxes between 1854 and the late 1940s on behalf of the Chinese state. Morse regarded the Chinese government as being a caretaker state that simply collected taxes and provided security services by installing police forces, and he stressed the independence of the guilds from the government: "The trade guilds [...] have moulded their own organization, sought their own objects, devised their own regulations, and enforced them in their own way and by their own methods."⁶³ To Morse we owe the frequently cited dictum "The guilds were never within the law: they grew up outside the law; and as associations they neither recognized the law nor claimed its protection."⁶⁴

59. Bradstock, "Craft Guilds", pp. 58ff.

60. Peng, "Shijiu shiji houqi", p. 91.

61. Peng, *Hanghui zhidu*, pp. 58–59.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

63. Morse, *Guilds of China*, pp. 20–21.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 27. He qualifies as "rare" the case of the Wenzhou carpenters' guild that was recognized by the city officials in return for *corvée* duties (p. 12).

Actually, Qing legislation issued by the central government does not include any provisions on guilds. Legal texts may call for vigilance against “monopolistic formation of cartels”,⁶⁵ but the manner of converting that warning into action was entrusted more or less to the judgement of local authorities. The local authorities, not the central government, interacted with the guilds, which explains why the handicraft regulations (*jiangzuo zeli*) issued by the central government for the officials who managed state building and production contain no references to guilds, although the artisans recruited from the open market were certainly organized into guilds. In the guild stele writings, only a few small clues suggest that the central government was even aware of the existence of the guilds.⁶⁶

In Hankou, the advantages of registering a guild rather than suffering administrative coercion prompted guilds to seek official recognition.⁶⁷ A registered guild could appeal to the local authorities if they saw their rights being infringed or their collective property violated. Some of the smaller guilds preferred to stay anonymous, but the much bigger Huizhou *huiguan* in Hankou applied for official recognition only twenty-seven years after its foundation.⁶⁸ All the same, informal existence was possible if a guild could make do without administrative protection.

How can these contradictory views of severe control versus casual laissez-faire of local governments be reconciled? To a certain extent, they reflect regional variance. From early on, Suzhou was one of the most important centres of manufacture, especially for silk and cotton textiles. Conflicts between employers and workers are recorded in the Suzhou guild epigraphy from the early eighteenth century, and it is conceivable that Suzhou authorities more than the local governments in other regions would try to gain close control of workers’ guilds. For Hankou, on the other hand, at least one case has been quoted where a guild – that of the itinerant fish peddlers – was not prohibited, but its exclusive sales rights were not acknowledged by the local authorities.⁶⁹

However, on the whole William Rowe found more instances of government support for guilds and shows attempts by them to court Hankou and provincial officials actively, for instance by conferring honorary titles on them.⁷⁰ Moreover, the Hankou guilds since pre-Taiping

65. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society*, p. 257, quoting from the legal code with commentary *Da Qing lüli huiji bianlan* 15.2–3.

66. The inscriptions in Niida, *Pekin kōshō girudo shiryōshū*, IV, p. 682 (1899) and p. 723 (1792), include the names of two government bureaus in lists of donors for the embellishment of two guild temples.

67. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society*, p. 258.

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 297–298.

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 334–337.

days had started to form alliances that eventually culminated in the “All-Hankou Guild Confederation” in which over a hundred separate guilds participated. They took over most of the city administration after the military mutiny in 1911 that led to the collapse of the Qing dynasty,⁷¹ so from the picture emerging from Hankou it might well be said that officials there were more accommodating towards the guilds than those of Suzhou.

Guild confederations as powerful as those in Hankou were not common in other Chinese cities with high concentrations of guilds,⁷² where the balance of power tended to depend more on the distribution of commercial and craft guilds in the respective localities. We may safely assume that merchant guilds possessed better resources and more possibilities to make the authorities act on their behalf.

In sum, cooperation and interconnection of local officials and guilds were certainly much more complex than Morse and later Max Weber believed, but the actual situations undoubtedly varied from place to place.

TOWARDS THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In recent years, the transition of the guilds from “traditional” to “modern” has been researched extensively by Chinese scholars. The establishment of chambers of commerce in the late Qing is a focal point for investigating the transition and further fate of the guilds. In an important case study, Chen Zhongping has described the beginnings of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce. Unlike what occurred in Hankou, guild alliances did not exist in the cities and market towns of the Yangzi Delta. In a complex process of cooperation and competition between elite merchants and local, provincial, and central governments, in 1904 the Qing state finally included on the agenda of reforms for its “New Policies” the need to foster commerce through the chambers of commerce. The government allowed the chambers to be organized and to have their leadership recruited from and elected by elite merchants, and the role of guilds was not specified in the 1904 decree. In practice, not all members but only the leaders of the most influential guilds were able to join the chambers of commerce too.⁷³

After the fall of the Qing the subsequent Republican governments in Peking and Nanking tried to strengthen state control of commerce and industries and by their legislation gradually eliminated the traditional forms of association.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 334.

72. Chen, “The Origins of Chinese Chambers of Commerce”, p. 169, especially n. 7.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

THE 1918 “REGULATIONS ON INDUSTRIAL AND
COMMERCIAL ASSOCIATIONS”

The first legal provisions that concern Chinese trade associations in particular trades, the “Regulations on Industrial and Commercial Associations”⁷⁴ were promulgated in 1918 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce of the Peking government. While enterprises in handicraft production were expressly excluded,⁷⁵ the main intention was to establish special new associations for industries and commercial branches which until then had had no associations. Pre-existing trade associations, such as *huiguan* and *gongsuo*, were allowed to continue operating but were expected to submit their charters to local authorities for official inspection.⁷⁶ The new associations had to have their charters endorsed as well.

Since the 1918 regulations allowed the coexistence of old and new associations and excluded handicraft trades, they contained no incentives for existing craft guilds to reorganize themselves. Interviews carried out in 1926 and 1927⁷⁷ reflect a situation where the legal existence of traditional handicraft guilds was still acknowledged, but guild people already felt a crisis approaching – not only in the form of mechanization, but also the threat to their self-determination posed by the authorities. As the bonds of traditional guild regulations grew weaker, members lost interest in guild meetings and common religious worship,⁷⁸ until the previous rules could hardly be enforced and guildsmen became increasingly reluctant to punish offenders or report non-members.⁷⁹

A detailed analysis shows that two types of guild were disappearing: those of artisans and traders whose goods were no longer in demand, such as makers of accessories for the male hairstyle of the queue – obligatory under the Manchu Qing dynasty, but abandoned thereafter – sword makers, and the like, and those which offered business prospects too huge to allow themselves to be restricted by guild rules. In Peking a case in point was the production of rugs, for which an export market had opened.⁸⁰ Generally, however, industrial production and the changed

74. Peng, *Zhongguo gongshang hanghui shiliao ji*, II, pp. 985–986, “Gong shang tongye gonghui guize” [Regulations on Industrial and Commercial Associations], decree no. 45 of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce (Nongshang bu), promulgated 27 April 1918.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 985, § 2.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 986, § 9. The commercial and craft associations founded before these regulations were issued are referred to as *gongsuo*, *hanghui*, and *huiguan* – an early occurrence of the term *hanghui*.

77. Burgess, *The Guilds of Peking*, p. 65.

78. Burgess reports that guilds with a relatively recent date of foundation, such as the dyestuff guild and the electricians’ guild, had no patron saints; *ibid.*, p. 175.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

80. Guild membership dropped from 354 to 40; *ibid.*, p. 221.

labour relations played a less important role there than in big treaty port cities along the coast. In Shanghai, for instance, small workshops were driven from the market much sooner, and “the guilds went with them” – like the former Shanghai cotton guild. At the same time, new guilds opened for electricians, and car and bicycle dealers who were “organized along the same lines as the ordinary Peking commercial guild”.⁸¹

While that might apply to small-scale merchant and common-occupation craft guilds, the *huiguan* and more notorious associations of the *bang*, or network type, especially the Green network (*qingbang*), for many decades fulfilled a particular function as job agencies for contract labourers in mechanized production such as shipbuilding, the armaments industry, and cotton mills.⁸² For skilled labourers, membership of the occupational guild was obligatory. The guilds collected fees, set levels of wages, and did not allow for individual wage agreements, while with the common-origin guilds, membership was not obligatory nor were members closely controlled.

Common-origin guilds were open to all social groups, not just workers, but their presidents were always officials from the respective home region and control over members was not severely enforced there. Common-occupation guilds and common-origin *huiguan* were often interlinked.⁸³ Associations such as the Green network usually organized temporary unskilled labour.

The transitional period lasted from the 1860s at least until the 1930s, and it took the trade unions, mostly organized by the Communist Party or the Guomindang (National People’s Party), considerable trouble to supersede completely the traditional ways of labour organization.⁸⁴

In the power struggles between the Guomindang and the Communist Party, Chiang Kaishek had used the Green network to suppress the communist trade unions in Shanghai during the Northern Expedition in April 1927, an action that set a violent end to the first United Front between the Guomindang and the communists. In the eighteenth century

81. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

82. Elizabeth Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor* (Stanford, CA, 1993), pp. 95–103.

83. Jiangnan zaochuanchang shi bianxie zu (ed.), *Jiangnan zaochuanchang shi, 1865–1949* [*History of the Shipyard of the Jiangnan Arsenal, 1865–1949*] (Shanghai, 1975), p. 26. For a variant perspective on guilds in the Jiangnan arsenal, see Christine Cornet, *Etat et entreprises en Chine XIXe–XXe siècles: Le chantier naval de Jiangnan, 1865–1937* (Paris, 1997), pp. 136–137. Cornet stresses that the occupational guilds were always also regional guilds. For a case in point, see Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*, p. 39, when, in 1902, within one shipbuilding company, the Ningbo shipwrights would not support a strike staged by the Canton shipwrights.

84. Linda Cooke Johnson, “Dock Labour at Shanghai”, in Sam Davies *et al.* (eds), *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History, 1790–1970* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 269–289, 274.

the Green network had emerged as an occupational association of boatmen with a rigid organizational structure.⁸⁵

In the non-mechanized handicraft sector too employers' and employees' or workers' associations were now distinctly parting company. Journeymen's guilds had fought for their right to exist since the early eighteenth century, but their numbers now were few. The "Short Table" contains six references to existing journeymen's guilds,⁸⁶ and two more are mentioned by Niida and Bradstock,⁸⁷ all founded in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Similarly to the case of the trade associations, in the transitional phase in the second and third decades of the twentieth century the "traditional" journeymen's associations increased, and at the same time "modern" labour unions were established under the growing influence of the Comintern, the Guomindang, and the Communist Party. The differences between the two lay in their scope – labour unions united several trade branches, while the journeymen's guilds represented and negotiated only for the members of a particular branch.

Power and decision-making structures in unions were more democratic, while in the pre-existing guilds masters frequently were the ones who decided among themselves questions of price fixing, wages, or hours of work.⁸⁸ Moreover, membership of trade unions had to remain voluntary, another factor different from the traditional system in which informal persuasion and pressure could be applied to force everybody in the trade or from a particular home region to join the guild.

85. William T. Rowe, "The Qingbang and Collaboration under the Japanese, 1939–1945: Materials in the Wuhan Municipal Archives", *Modern China*, 8 (1982), pp. 491–499.

86. No. 267: Hubei, Hankou, Earth emperor palace (Tuhuang gong), built in 1867 by the journeymen plasterers of the Wen network at the Juren ward; no. 305: 1871, Hubei, Hankou, Sun guildhouse (Taiyang gongsuo), built in 1871 by the coal and charcoal journeymen's guild (Meitan shiyongongyi hui); no. 417: Hubei, Hankou, Four saints hall (Si shen dian), the guildhouse of the firework journeymen, built in 1890; no. 389: Hunan, Changsha, Regulations (*tiaogui*) negotiated in 1887 by the journeymen of the lacquerers' shops; no. 554: Guangxu era (1875–1908), Hunan, Changsha, Western network tailors' trade (Xi bang chengyi ye). The Changsha tailors had seven associations. The Xuanyuan and the Luck Supporting Association were organized by the masters, the Lords of Luck, Luck and Excellence, Rising Luck, Luck Producing, and Luck and Bliss associations were organized by the journeymen. In the Guangxu era the colleagues reunited and revised their old regulations; no. 555: Guangxu (1875–1908), Hunan, Changsha, Fair Business Hall (Zheng ye tang), established by journeymen and masters of the brush shops (*bidian*). Formerly journeymen and masters belonged to separate networks (*bang*). After the construction of the Fair Business Hall, they united, but their separate regulations still applied.

87. Christine Moll-Murata, "Social Harmony and Social Unrest: Guild Activities in Qing Dynasty Peking", in Chiu Ling-yeong and Donatella Guida (eds), *A Passion for China* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 265–266, for the strikes of the shoemaker journeymen's guild that was founded some decades before the respective shop owners' association. Bradstock, "Craft Guilds", p. 231, mentions a Changsha tinsmith journeymen's guild.

88. Burgess, *The Guilds of Peking*, p. 224.

Instances of the fusion of guilds with labour unions were reported, for in fact building up the labour unions, the legalization of strikes, arbitration by government commissions, and the principle of voluntary membership were some of the basic policies of the Guomindang which it enforced from its power base in Canton.⁸⁹ A 1927 survey carried out by the Canton city government shows that of 180 labour unions, 74 were reorganized guilds.⁹⁰

Apprenticeship, another vital sector of the earlier guilds, was evolving into a system whereby the rights and duties of apprentices were regulated more clearly, and which entailed more theoretical training in schools that were often operated or supervised by the government. Finally, the newly established chambers of commerce – by 1915 869 foundations in cities and towns were reported⁹¹ – became control organs that supervised the activities of the old guilds as well as the new trade associations. In Peking, the chambers became increasingly powerful. They collected taxes, and, in the court of the Chamber of Commerce, arbitrated disputes among guild members, matters which had formerly been settled by neutral members from within the guild. The chambers, in contrast to the guilds and guild federations in the cities, were interlinked at the provincial and national levels.

THE 1927 “REGULATIONS ON CRAFT ASSOCIATIONS”

After the National People’s Party had consolidated its government in Nanking in 1927, economic development ranked high on its agenda. The “Regulations on Craft Associations”⁹² were promulgated late in 1927, and while the legislation of the previous government focused more on reform of the merchant associations, the new regulations formally put an end to the traditional craft guilds too. They stipulated that all existing guilds should be reorganized and should then report to the authorities.⁹³ That ruling was to be applied to all production enterprises, regardless of whether they were mechanized or handicraft manufacturers. In any administrative region the associations were the sole representatives of their respective trade branch,⁹⁴ and, as in the 1918 regulations, the associations were obliged to set up regulations according to a set pattern. Moreover, they were expected to cooperate with government authorities by answering questionnaires on the situation of their trade.⁹⁵

89. *Ibid.*, p. 230. Canton was the capital of an alternative military government established in 1917 under Sun Yatsen.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 225, quoting Ta Chen and S.K. Sheldon Tso, “The Unionization of Labor in China”, *Monthly Labor Review* (November 1927).

91. Burgess, *The Guilds of Peking*, pp. 227–229.

92. Peng, *Zhongguo gongshang hanghui shiliao ji*, II, pp. 990–995, “Gongyi tongye gonghui guize”, promulgated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Industry (Nonggong bu) on 21 November 1927.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 995, § 36.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 990, §§ 2 and 3.

95. *Ibid.*, § 12.

Together with the 1929 “Law on Industrial and Commercial Associations” (*Gong shang tongye gonghui fa*) and the 1930 “Detailed Regulations for the Execution of the Law on Industrial and Commercial Associations” (*Gong shang tongye gonghui fa shixing xice*), the new body of commercial legislation now emphasized compulsory membership and cooperation with the government and secured the inclusion of all firms in a certain branch.⁹⁶ The old-style guilds were to be reorganized within one year and had to report to a supervisory committee (*Shangren tuanti zhengli weiyuanhui*). Almost all the associations were renamed with a unified style.

In the Republic of China the actions of commercial associations were closely monitored and shown in public municipal statistics. By 1934 Wuhan, the amalgamation of the previous Hankou and its adjacent districts Hanyang and Wuchang, had 159 new associations, Shanghai 236, of which 40 were industrial (figures for 1936), and Chengdu in Sichuan had 111 by 1939. By 1933, a total of 4,185 new associations was recorded in 21 provinces,⁹⁷ certainly more than even the closest reading of Qing texts and steles could ever reveal. The process of transformation seems to have been concluded by the 1930s.

GUILDS IN TRANSITION

During the 1940s, another large-scale investigation of traditional guilds and their successors, the trade and craft associations, was conducted in Peking by the Japanese law historian, Niida Noboru and his colleagues and students. They visited about fifty sites of former guilds, recorded the stele texts they found there and interviewed guild representatives. Their interviews show that little enthusiasm was felt for the new trade associations, while nostalgia for the guilds remained strong.

Why was that so? More than anything it was because the new associations had less autonomy than the guilds. One informant from the barbers’ association said that the statutes of their association had been forced on them in 1942, but that they were not considered the “real” rules of the trade.⁹⁸ To a representative of the hatters’ guild, inheritance of leadership positions seemed preferable to rotational directorship.⁹⁹ Several interviewees confirmed that belonging to an association brought little or no benefit,¹⁰⁰ and that led to a

96. Peng, *Hanghui zhidu*, p. 76.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

98. Niida, *Pekin kōshō girudo shiryōshū*, II, p. 294.

99. *Ibid.*, III, p. 529.

100. *Ibid.*, interview at the furriers’ association, p. 561 (“there was no advantage in establishing commercial or trade associations”); carpenters’ guild, IV, p. 652 (“the only advantage of guild membership is being able to see the theatre performances”); jade carvers’ association, I, p. 38 (“it is no advantage to be a member of the [new] association (*gonghui*)”); gold and silver smelters’

situation in which the old *huiguan* and the “modern” associations coexisted – sometimes in competition, but sometimes complementing each other too.

The rule of sole representation of one trade branch was sometimes avoided by declaring the reason for association as being common geographic descent rather than common occupation. A Shanghai guidebook published in 1930 lists nine guilds in the tobacco trade, nine dyers’ guilds, and three lacquerware guilds, many of which in their names suggest common-origin associations.¹⁰¹ In general, guild members were friendlier disposed towards the *huiguan*, which retained some of their social, religious, and cultural functions. They rejected the new associations because they considered them to be instruments of the authorities, which in Japanese-occupied Peking restricted access to raw materials and fixed prices.

The transition from guilds to trade associations might not have roused as much antipathy in other cities with bigger industrial sectors where the guilds, especially the *huiguan*, were not as omnipresent as they were in Peking. Clearly, representatives of small-scale handicraft business who had known the traditional system, with values such as solidarity, relative economic autonomy, and guild morals, would resent top-down reforms which restricted their range of self-determination and swept away the pre-existing hierarchy and didactic methods – to little avail, however. After the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the last remaining traditional guilds were phased out.

SHORT CASE STUDY: JINGDEZHEN

What can we know about the guilds beyond the great and well-documented centres of Peking, Suzhou, Shanghai, and Hankou? Despite the lack of documentation, a look at industrial Jingdezhen can illustrate the obvious existence of guilds, the qualities of protoguilds, and their survival well into the twentieth century.

As can be seen from the “Short Table”, Jiangxi province in general does not rank highly among host regions for guilds. For the market town of Jingdezhen, the biggest porcelain production centre during the Qing and, until the late eighteenth century, the largest in the world, only the two associations “Perfect Porcelain” and “Celebrated Porcelain” are recorded. In the town’s heyday in the eighteenth century, about a million workers are said to have been engaged in the porcelain trade there, so we might ask why so little Jingdezhen guild activity is recorded in Peng Zeyi’s collection. Artisan and commercial activities of trade lines (*hang*) and networks (*bang*) are mentioned

association, I, p. 127 (“nobody wants to become a director of the association (*tongye gonghui huizhang*). It [is a rotational task that brings no advantages and] costs money”). See also Bradstock, “Craft Guilds”, p. 247.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

here and there in Qing contemporary writings on Jingdezhen, as well as in surveys and retrospectives of the Republican era, but stele inscriptions or other contemporary guild documents have not been preserved.

However, the customary rules of the trades were recorded in local gazetteers and monographs on porcelain production in Jingdezhen, and they report that division of labour was highly developed, with at least eight major production lines: kiln firing; forming of the blanks on the wheel or in moulds; painting of ornaments; production of *saggars*, the protective clay containers used for firing porcelain objects; packing and transporting; forming and attaching the standing rim of the vessels; production of tools for porcelain making, especially clay-working knives; service trades such as cart building, and the horse guild. Those were further split into thirty-six subdivisions, which explains the saying that any finished porcelain vessel had passed through seventy-two hands – also an echo of the preferred figures for Song dynasty *hang* within one city.

There are no easily identifiable formal guilds, but rather protoguilds that roughly tally with the subdivisions, so that basically as many trade networks (*hangbang*) existed as trades (*hang*). The difficulty is to assign those networks to localities and to guild houses, which in Jingdezhen were of the *huiguan* (common-origin) and *shuyuan* (Confucian-academy) type rather than *gongsuo* (common occupation).

About half the remaining *huiguan* had alternative names of Confucian academies. The geographic distribution of the original regions of members of those houses is as follows: Jiangxi (same province, different prefectures) 10; Guangdong (neighbouring provinces) 2; Anhui 2; Zhejiang 1; Hubei 1; Hunan 1; Fujian 1; Jiangsu (Lower Yangzi) 3; Shanxi (remote North-western) 1. The date of origin of the houses is not recorded, but the names of a few of them occur in eighteenth-century texts.

Also known are the home regions of ceramic workers within Jiangxi province. Duchang¹⁰² people were engaged in almost all trades of high, medium, and low skill, as kiln workers, formers of round forms, kiln fillers, kiln builders, painters, and *saggar* makers. Potters who produced open forms came from Fuzhou about 200 kilometres away by water; only the top quality kiln builders of the Wei family came from Jingdezhen itself, but they were later superseded by the Yus from Duchang. Those who performed the highly skilled trade of forming and carving vases came from Fengcheng, about 250 kilometres away. Workers in low-skilled trades, such as *saggar* makers, came at first from Leping and Poyang, relatively nearby at 25–40 kilometres away, but later from Duchang, Fuzhou, and Raozhou too. Packers of small items came from all five northern and central prefectures of Jiangxi province.¹⁰³

102. On the northern shore of Lake Poyang, c.100 kilometres from Jingdezhen by water.

103. Liang Miaotai, *Ming Qing Jingdezhen chengshi jingji yanjiu* [Research on the Urban Economy of Ming and Qing Jingdezhen] (Nanchang, 1991), p. 216.

Information is relatively scarce for the networks of artisans.¹⁰⁴ “Old” and “new” networks were comprised of people from Duchang and Poyang; the “Perfect Porcelain” and “Celebrated Porcelain” network convened at the Jingyang Academy. “Perfect Porcelain” kiln workers specialized in pine-faggot kilns, while “Celebrated Porcelain” workers used brushwood kilns. The Jiangzhen guildhouse¹⁰⁵ was built with donations from the Duchang potters, but was not reserved for potters and was frequented by Duchang people who came to Jingdezhen for academic formation, so it came to be called “Old Southern Academy”.

Although guild regulations either did not exist or are not preserved, customary rules offer some insights into the activities of the networks. Most of them concern the riskier part of the production and distribution processes, namely firing, unloading of the kilns, and packing. Rules are recorded for the critical periods in the twelfth lunar month, when work was stopped, the beginning of work in the third lunar month, and the renewal of contracts or the dismissal of labourers and foremen in the seventh lunar month. When work was interrupted during the winter period, workers could return to their home regions, but some of them stayed behind.¹⁰⁶

Merchant networks, also called *bang*, are well documented for the twentieth century, twenty-six being reported for 1936,¹⁰⁷ and as business was thriving after the war years the networks increased to as many as seventy-six. According to one twentieth-century observer, owners of ceramic businesses had to be members of one or other of the guilds, or form a partnership in which one of the members belonged to a guild. The sanction of the guilds was required before a newcomer could begin manufacture, and the guild had to approve beforehand what type of ware could be made.¹⁰⁸

104. “Jingdezhen de fengqing yu meili de zhuanhuo” [Jingdezhen Customs and Beautiful Legends], available at <http://auto.sohu.com/20050727/n240199132.shtml> [last accessed 21 July 2008]; Jingdezhen shi difangzhi bangongshi (ed.), *Zhongguo cidu Jingdezhen shi ciye zhi. Shizhi er jian* [Monograph on the Porcelain Industry of China's Porcelain City Jingdezhen], 2 vols (Beijing, 2004), II, pp. 775–781, “Ciye hanggui” [Rules of Trade of the Porcelain Makers].

105. Peng Zeyi, *Zhongguo jindai shougongyeshi ziliao* [Materials on Early Modern Chinese Craft History], 4 vols (Beijing, 1962–1984), I, p. 184, quoting from a gazetteer of Duchang county compiled in the 1870s, *Tongzhi Duchang xianzhi*.

106. “Jingdezhen de fengqing”, section 10: “After production is stopped in the XIIth month, the workers have nothing to do. To make a living, they sell a great quantity of vegetables, other regional products and eel, small fish, and freshwater snails in the streets.”

107. *Jingdezhen taoci shigao* [A Draft History of Jingdezhen Porcelain] (Beijing, 1959), p. 322: seven from Hubei, six from Jiangxi, two from Manchuria, two from Zhejiang, two from Anhui, one each from Tianjin, Guangdong, Henan, Sichuan, Peking, Jiangsu, and Hunan.

108. Rose Kerr (ed.), *Ceramic Technology* [V, pt. 12 of *Science and Civilisation in China*] (Cambridge, 2004), p. 771, n. 230, quoting Stanley Fowler Wright, *Kiangsi Native Trade and its Taxation* (Shanghai, 1920), pp. 191–192. Fees were predetermined, and conditions were very restrictive.

From the 1930s we have a relatively clear overview of trade associations classified by common occupation, but not formally registered as new-style craft associations. Twenty-one branches are listed under their traditional names, among them the venerable “Perfect Porcelain” and “Celebrated Porcelain”. They were all designated as *she*, which implies a sacrificial community.

The author of the Jingdezhen industrial history was obviously not favourably inclined to the associations. He informs us that they existed of old, but now did not have much to do. They merely congregated several times a year and offered sacrifices.¹⁰⁹ After the foundation of the People’s Republic, such associations were deemed even more dubious in retrospect. They seemed to be breeding grounds for the underground activities of secret societies, but such insinuations are formulated in the most generalized way¹¹⁰ so that the illegal potential of the old Jingdezhen guilds can hardly be accurately assessed. Nevertheless, the range of guild and protoguild activities, especially of the informal *bang* networks that were not officially registered, could include clandestine action and thus constitute the reverse side of their relationship with the government.

GUILDS WORLDWIDE AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Many of the features outlined above will seem familiar to guild historians worldwide, and in fact when studying overviews of European guild history the similarities seem to outweigh the differences.

Economic functions

Chinese guilds tried and often succeeded in regulating and dominating markets for raw materials, labour, and sales. One of their objectives was to exert monopolies by complete inclusion of potential members in the same trade lines. They assumed that markets for work or business in any locality were “basically finite”.¹¹¹

Membership

Although it might have been the ideal of the guild functionaries worldwide, compulsory membership and sole representation of a trade in a certain territory was obviously not easily enforceable. One difference between European and Chinese guilds lies in the rationale for group formation. The Ming and Qing guilds were first united by common origin in unfamiliar, perhaps even hostile, surroundings. Common occupation as a bond for guild members was a

109. Wang Siqing, *Jingdezhen ciye shi* [History of the Ceramic Industry in Jingdezhen] (Shanghai, 1936), pp. 183–185.

110. *Jingdezhen taoci shigao*, p. 299.

111. Bradstock, “Craft Guilds”, p. 253.

slightly later development. In Europe, we know of similar structures in the form of the Hansa. The Chinese common-origin associations institutionalized in the *huiguan* were stronger and more persistent than the common-occupation guilds, but the functional range of *huiguan* was larger than that of craft and commercial associations.

Chronology

Depending on definitions, Chinese “guilds” flourished either earlier or later than European guilds. Merchant and artisan associations of the *hang* type started out in eighth-century cities as part of the government-organized local and fiscal order and then developed into more independent bodies. The guilds of the *huiguan* type from the sixteenth century, formally ended by 1927 but in fact in existence until about 1949 but with a much reduced profile, were first founded as associations of travelling merchants from the same home regions. Later, common-occupation groups of merchants and artisans established houses of assembly too. The designation *hang* persisted throughout, sometimes as a vague reference to the trade, and implicitly to mean the guild. Under additional government pressure in the twentieth century guilds of both types gradually gave way to mechanization, large-scale production and capitalist labour relations, but the *huiguan* and *bang* retained their functions as labour recruiters.

Local setting

The range of operations was confined to particular localities. Even though the common home region constituted an important reason for guild formation, the relation to home was in most cases not very close, at least not in the big cities. That might have been different for production regions such as Jingdezhen, Foshan, and Suzhou, where migrant artisans were engaged in seasonal labour and returned at least once a year to their home regions, which for many of them were not far off. But for merchants especially, the extended periods of sojourn and rare visits to hometowns were proverbial.¹¹²

In terms of business, municipal guild confederations did occur, as in late nineteenth-century Hankou and Chongqing, but they seem to have been rare. In parts of central Europe, some guilds had been established nationwide since the sixteenth century and formed branches or subdivisions, and rural guilds were not uncommon.¹¹³ At the present stage of inquiry, comparable

112. Consider the story cited by Antonia Finnane, *Speaking of Yangzhou: A Chinese City, 1550–1850* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), p. 231, about the Huizhou merchant’s wife who bought a pearl every year her husband was away from home. The husband returned three years after her death and found that she had bought twenty pearls over the years.

113. See the section on spatial structures of the guild system in Ehmer’s article in the present volume, pp. 143–158.

structures are not known for China, but judging from Peng Zeyi's still underrepresented "Short Table", for some provinces, especially Hunan, many more guilds were reported for rural areas than for others, surely a significant early clue and requiring further investigation. It reminds us too that the regional ranges we compare should be commensurate, since within Europe as well as China in its extension during the Qing period, in India, and the Ottoman Empire, regional variety finds its reflection as much in social structures and modes of association.¹¹⁴

Finally, allowing that in China guilds of the *huiguan* and *gongsuo* type were founded most often in towns and cities, the distribution of the population too needs to be taken into account. According to Jan de Vries's analysis, by 1800 the number of cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants was much greater in China than in Europe, while in Europe the number of cities with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants was much larger.¹¹⁵ By 1800 only 6 or 7 per cent of the Chinese population, between 16.2 million and 18.9 million people, lived in cities.¹¹⁶ In that light, the large number of guild foundations in the Low Countries compared with the relatively few documented Ming and Qing guilds in the whole of China does not come as a surprise, if we assume that the critical population limit in the Low Countries of 2,500 to enable the foundation of craft guilds¹¹⁷ applied equally for other regions and that in very large cities with big consumer markets it was more difficult to enforce craft and trade monopolies than in smaller-sized towns.

Relation to the government

As individual organizations, guilds remained out of reach of the professed interest of the central government. It was up to local authorities to acknowledge the existence of guilds and to sanction their self-devised regulations. In return, cooperation was expected by guilds in tax collecting and various municipal functions and charitable activities. The question of whether Chinese guilds were completely autonomous during the Qing period or could exist without formal government recognition has been

114. For a sketch of the regional variations in Dutch guilds and neighbouring *Zunftlandschaften*, see Jan Lucassen and Maarten Prak, "Conclusion", in Maarten Prak *et al.* (eds), *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power and Representation* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 224–231, 228ff.

115. Jan de Vries, *European Urbanization, 1500–1800* (London, 1984), p. 262.

116. Gilbert Rozman, *Urban Networks in Ch'ing China and Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton, NJ, 1973), p. 300, cited in Ramon Myers and Wang Yeh-chien, "Economic Developments, 1644–1800", in Willard J. Peterson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of China*, IX, part 1: *The Ch'ing Empire to 1800* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 579.

117. Bert De Munck, Piet Lourens, and Jan Lucassen, "The Establishment and Distribution of Craft Guilds in the Low Countries, 1000–1800", in Prak, *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries*, pp. 32–73, 72.

discussed, controversially, by both Chinese and Western authors. In the Republican era, governments formally and practically increased their control over guild structures and activities.

Class relations in the guilds

Contemporary observers noted the relative harmony in guilds between “master and man” (Burgess). Singular instances are known when journeymen had applied for, but not been granted, official recognition for their own guilds in the early eighteenth century and such cases increased in number during the late Qing. Capitalist labour conditions in large-scale industrial enterprises would soon bring an end to the guilds as “face-to-face groups” (Burgess) where employers and employees were each represented, and separate labour unions and employers’ trade organizations would be established in those fields of business. Where small-scale handicraft production prevailed, guilds or informal protoguilds survived longer.

In the transitional phase of industrialization at the treaty ports, guilds and *huiguan* filled a particular role as job agencies for contractual labourers, who depended on middlemen from the guilds who hired them for the modern industrial enterprises in a relationship that has been characterized as “vertical”.¹¹⁸

Training and testing

In the process of transmission of skills and training, guilds did not organize formal examinations at the end of the usual three-year term of apprenticeship. Masters were not tested when they opened a workshop independently. It was not a requirement that apprentices should observe a phase of tramping for any period of time, and in some craft branches apprentices were allowed to stay on in their master’s workshop after they had finished their term, or the apprenticeship was extended beyond the agreed term to make up expenses masters had, allegedly, incurred. But since apprentices were not paid, the incentive to leave their first workplace was strong. In the twentieth century, late-Qing reformers and subsequent republican governments set up vocational schools modelled on those of Japan and the West for crafts, industries, and commerce.

Intellectual property rights

During most of the Qing period, intellectual property rights were not an issue for the Chinese guilds. Single cases when individual publishers could legally defend their rights to certain editions are recorded from the late

118. Johnson, “Dock Labour at Shanghai”, pp. 271ff.; Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*, pp. 27, 54–55, 235.

Ming, but that type of “copyright” could not always be enforced.¹¹⁹ We have, however, no indication that guilds participated actively in such lawsuits; in fact the Shanghai publishers’ guild was expected to adjudicate in cases of conflict only after a copyright law was promulgated in 1906.¹²⁰

However, skills, technical knowledge, and inventions were not protected by legislation. Instead, they had to be defended by keeping trade secrets within families. Well-known cases of families who preserved craft knowledge over generations are the court architects Lei, who constructed the imperial villas at Yuanmingyuan near Peking, and the kiln builders Wei in Jingdezhen, who rebuilt the kilns at the imperial manufactory of Jingdezhen after they had been destroyed in a revolt in 1674.¹²¹ Imperial protection thus must have come closest to the patent rights of the West.

Welfare, municipal, and religious functions

These seem very similar to those of European guilds. Religious services for guild patrons are recorded from early times, and it is characteristic of Qing dynasty stele texts from Peking that they concern, for the greater part, the building, maintenance, and embellishment of temples for the patron saints. If guilds could afford it, the first priority in the field of internal welfare would be the provision of burial grounds, and municipal and security functions increased generally from the mid-nineteenth century. In the cultural field, the priority lay in the arrangement of stage plays for the entertainment of members, and of the patron saint. The bigger guild houses all provided theatres with elaborate stages and auditoriums.

Women in the guilds?

As in Europe,¹²² women are hardly ever mentioned in either guild documents or stele texts. However, some early modern European cities have preserved archives which allow insights, for example, on female owners of craft workshops, some of whom were widows, or daughters of previous masters, and information about women’s guilds.¹²³ For China, although such documentation is extremely rare, we know that women

119. Chow Kai-wing, *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China* (Stanford, CA, 2004), pp. 141–142, especially n. 281, for a case dating from c.1650 when a complaint to a local magistrate by a publisher was successful. Cynthia Brokaw, *Commerce in Culture: The Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), p. 179, cites an example when a similar complaint was turned down.

120. Christopher Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876–1937* (Vancouver, BC, 2004), p. 177.

121. Kerr, *Ceramic Technology*, p. 212.

122. Ehmer, “Artisans, Guilds and Craft Regulations”, pp. 72–73.

123. See Clare Crowston’s article in the present volume (pp. 19–44) for a discussion of women’s guilds in Paris, Rouen, and Cologne.

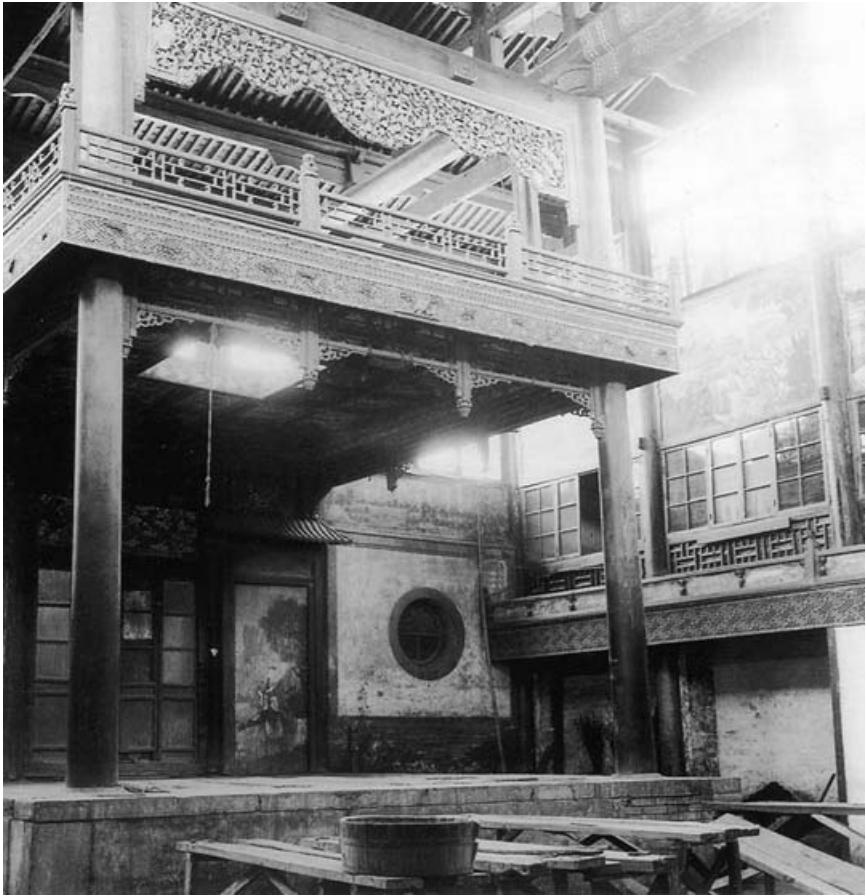


Figure 1. Theatre stage of the Zhengyi ci gold and silver smelters' guild house in Peking. The guild was founded by silver smelters from Zhejiang province in 1667. The theatre is now renovated and used for Peking opera performances.

Source: *Shen Nianle*, *Liulichang shihua* (Historical narrative of the Liulichang [quarter in Peking]) (*Beijing*, 2001), p. 106.

were engaged as a temporary or permanent workforce in the workshops, or more frequently at home. That seems to have been so in the case of a Chongqing embroiderers' guild in 1849, from which it is known that "the male workers, the owners, and the journeymen negotiated new regulations".¹²⁴ Most probably, that means that women produced semi-finished products which were then processed by male workers.

124. Peng, *Zhongguo gongshang hanghui shiliao ji*, II, pp. 997–1048, "Short Table", p. 1017.



Figure 2. The renovated Zhengyi ci stage in 2000.

Source: Webpage by Masahiro Nishimura, *Pekin no dentōteki 'xilou' (Peking traditional opera houses)*, http://www003.upp.so-net.ne.jp/jyoururi/beijing/zheng_yi.jpeg, installed September 2000, accessed November 2007.

Women might have been represented just in that particular guild, as for the most part the dominant pattern of female homework probably prevented them from active participation in guilds. Both the cases cited here show that closer investigation, especially of typical women's trades such as textile production and finishing, could well yield further clues to women's possible preindustrial affiliation with guilds. In the twentieth century, female labour in the factories of the industrial centres was usually recruited by guild-based labour contractors.¹²⁵

Guild-free zones

In some regions or branches where we should expect guild formation, it did not occur. Yangzhou, for instance, the large and wealthy salt-trading centre dominated by Huizhou merchants on the Lower Yangzi, had very few

125. For the clashes from 1922 to 1924 between a network-connected (Green network and/or Red network) union-type women's silk filature workers' association and the Cocoon Guild of Jiangnan filature owners, see Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*, pp. 171–175.

guilds or non-commercial common-origin associations. Antonia Finnane attributes that to the fact that the city was actually built by Huizhou merchants, who were so numerous there that they constituted a critical mass so homogenous that common-origin associations were unnecessary, nor, amazingly, were formal common-trade ones.¹²⁶ A similar, but much more low-profile case was where rural industries, such as the printing industry of Sibao in western Fujian on the border with Jiangxi province, were managed entirely within extended families, so that no guilds were necessary nor desired there. Merchants used *huiguan* mainly as hostels during their business trips or longer periods away.¹²⁷

In sum, when considering the impact of Chinese guild activities during the second millennium, informal professional associations, entirely guild-free zones, and “unguilded”¹²⁸ craftspeople and merchants who relied on kinship ties must be taken into account as well. Mapping and evaluating their informal activities, in China as elsewhere,¹²⁹ poses a great challenge for historical enquiry.

CONCLUSION

A numerical appraisal of all types of economic association in China’s macro regions is currently in full swing, and it is to be expected that the number of known Chinese guilds with statutes, official recognition, and common property will increase as documentary and archive records become more openly accessible. It would come as a surprise, however, if they should reach the aggregate number of documented European guilds. Different socioeconomic problems – or the same core problems, but on a different scale – require different institutions. Informality, customary rather than formal laws, and reliance on extended family structures together with a comparatively limited number of guilds that tried to enforce trade monopolies and channelled labour migration was the obvious answer for Chinese circumstances.

126. Finnane, *Speaking of Yangzhou*, p. 241.

127. Brokaw, *Commerce in Culture*, p. 240.

128. See the reference to unguilded artisans in Bulgarian cities in Onur Yildirim’s contribution to the present volume, pp. 73–93.

129. See Roy’s article in the present volume (pp. 95–120) for a discussion of the rise and function of Indian informal socioeconomic collectives.

APPENDIX

The following tables and graph are based on Peng Zeyi (ed.), *Zhongguo gongshang hanghui shiliao ji* [Collection of Historical Materials on Chinese Craft and Commercial Guilds], 2 vols (Beijing, 1995), II, pp. 997–1048, “Short Table of the Chinese Craft and Commercial Guilds, 1655–1911”.

Table 1. Designations for Qing dynasty guilds

Designation	Translation	Guilds with dates of foundation	Remarks	Guilds without dates of foundation	Sum	%
<i>Gongsuo</i>	Public hall	221		47	268	41.55
<i>Huiguan</i>	[Common origin] Assembly house	141		69	210	32.56
<i>Tang</i>	Hall	41	Can be combined with other designations, such as <i>gongsuo</i>	1	42	6.51
<i>Gong</i>	Palace (for religious veneration)	30	Can be combined with other designations, such as <i>gongsuo</i>		30	4.65
<i>Dian</i>	Hall	20	Can be combined with other designations, such as <i>gongsuo</i>		20	3.10
<i>Bang</i>	Mutual help group, work gang	12	Can be combined with other designations, such as <i>gongsuo</i>		12	1.86
<i>Miao</i>	Temple (Daoist)	11		1	12	1.86
<i>Hui</i>	Association	10			10	1.55
<i>Gonghui</i>	Public association	8		2	10	1.55
<i>She</i>	Altar (for ancestor veneration)	5			5	0.78
<i>Shuyuan</i>	(Confucian) Academy	4			4	0.62
<i>Ge</i>	House	4			4	0.62
<i>Zhuang</i>	Cottage	3			3	0.47
<i>Gongguan</i>	Public mansion	3			3	0.47
<i>Hang</i>	Trade line	3		2	5	0.78
<i>Ci</i>	Shrine	2			2	0.31
<i>Si</i>	Sacrificial shrine	2			2	0.31
<i>Si</i>	Temple (Buddhist)	1	Combined with <i>huiguan</i>		1	0.16
<i>Hanghui</i>	Guild	1		1	2	0.31
Total		522		123	645	100.00

Table 2. *Distribution of guilds in provinces and cities*

Provinces	Dated	Not dated	Total	Thereof: Cities	Dated	Not dated	Total
Jiangsu	235	58	293	Suzhou (Jiangsu)	101	31	132
Hunan	150		150	Shanghai (Jiangsu)	113		113
Hubei	90	7	97	Changsha (Hunan)	92		92
Peking	45	7	52	Hankou (Hubei)	88		88
Sichuan	36		36	Peking	45	7	52
Guangdong	23	6	29	Nanjing (Jiangsu)	5	27	32
Fengtian		15	15	Chongqing (Sichuan)	24		24
Guangxi	12	2	14	Tianjin (Zhili)	2	9	11
Zhili	3	9	12	Fuzhou (Fujian)		10	10
Fujian and Taiwan	1	10	11	Hangzhou (Zhejiang)	6		6
Zhejiang	7		7	Canton (Guangdong)	4		4
Yunnan		5	5	Grand total	480	84	564
Shandong	1	3	4				
Shanxi	4		4				
Anhui	3		3				
Jiangxi	1		1				
Grand total	611	122	733				

Table 3. *Sending regions (provinces and cities)*

Provinces	Dated	Not dated	Total	Thereof: Cities	Dated	Not dated	Total
Guangdong	30	13	43	Ningbo (Zhejiang)	11	2	13
Zhejiang	24	5	29	Suzhou (Jiangsu)	8		8
Shanxi	20	6	26	Shaoxing (Zhejiang)	3	1	4
Anhui	16	7	23	Changsha (Hunan)	3		3
Fujian and Taiwan	14	9	23	Chaozhou (Guangdong)	3		3
Jiangsu	20	3	23	Zhangzhou (Fujian)	3		3
Hubei	16	4	20	Shanghai (Jiangsu)	2		2
Jiangxi	9	5	14	Hangzhou (Zhejiang)	2		2
Hunan	8	5	13	Tianjin (Zhili)	2		2
Shandong	3	8	11	Nanjing (Jiangsu)	1		1
Shaanxi	5	1	6	Canton (Guangdong)	1		1
Guangxi	1	4	5	Grand total	39	3	42
Henan	4	1	5				
Zhili	1	4	5				
Sichuan		2	2				
Yunnan	1	1	2				
Fengtian		1	1				
Gansu	1		1				
Guizhou		1	1				
Grand total	173	80	253				

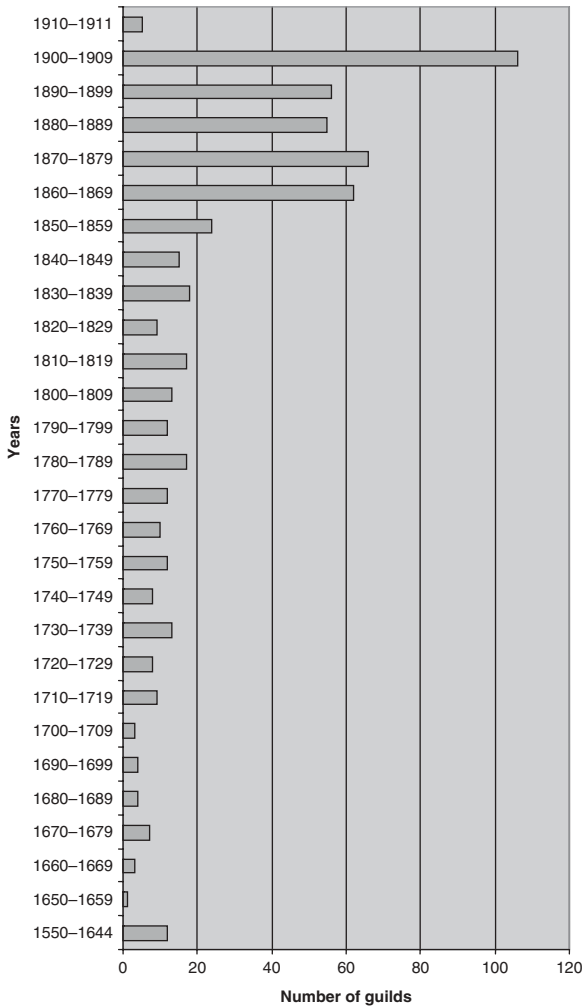


Figure 3. Guild foundations during the Ming and Qing dynasties.